

THE PSYCHODYNAMICS OF WORSHIP
A STUDY BASED ON PAUL W. PRUYSER'S DIAGNOSTIC
VARIABLES FOR PASTORAL COUNSELING

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE	1
A. My Personal Concern	1
B. Concerns of Others	2
C. Thesis	4
CHAPTER I. DEFINITIONS	6
A. Worship	6
B. Liturgy	7
CHAPTER II. MOTIVATIONS FOR WORSHIP	10
A. Basic Need	10
B. Four Motivational Needs	10
C. Some Cautions	13
CHAPTER III. THE PSYCHO-DYNAMICS OF WORSHIP	15
A. A Sense of the Holy - Awe	16
1. Integrity vs. Despair	17
2. Wisdom - the Transcending of the Self	19
B. A Sense of Providence	21
1. Trust vs. Mistrust	21
2. Hope	24
C. A Sense of Faith	27
1. Identity vs. Diffusion	27
2. Fidelity	30
D. A Sense of Grace or Gratitude	33
1. Autonomy vs. Self-Doubt	34
2. Will	37
E. A Sense of Repentance	39
1. Initiative vs. Guilt	39
2. Purpose	42
F. A Sense of Belonging or Communion	45
1. Intimacy vs. Isolation	45
2. Love	49
G. A Sense of Vocation	54
1. Industry vs. Inferiority	54
2. Competence	56
CHAPTER IV. CONCLUSIONS	61
A. Potential for Healing	61
B. Insights from a Survey	62
C. The Focusing of the Vision	65
D. To Transmit the Vision of Reality	67

CHAPTER V. STEPS TOWARD APPLICATION 69

 A. Design a Service 69

 B. Conduct a Study 70

 C. Develop a Seminar for Pastors 74

 D. Summation 75

BIBLIOGRAPHY 76

ABSTRACT

In this study an attempt is made to show that the worship event informed by insights from the fields of psychology and pastoral counseling is one of the most potent and available resources for creating a climate where people can find healing and direction for life. Further, the conviction which underlies the study is that the pastor does not need to be torn between the roles of counselor and leader of worship. By integrating these two aspects of ministry, powerful dynamics are set in motion which speak to the full range of emotional need. The meaning of worship and liturgy is explored as an event which involves both pastor and laity in an experience encompassing the whole of life. Four motivations for worship are discussed, after which a few precautions concerning worship are outlined.

In discussion of the psychodynamics of worship, it is pointed out that the psychological variables suggested by Paul W. Pruyser for use by the pastoral counselor are the same dynamics which function in worship. This study attempts to integrate these variables with the dynamics of worship with the hope that this will enable the pastor to develop a program of study on that subject for the congregation. The variables are: A Sense of the Holy, Providence, Faith, Grace, Repentance, Communion, and Vocation. Each of these are paired with psychosocial themes and a human virtue, all of which have strong biblical affinity.

A brief survey was conducted in several small churches in an attempt to discover what members think about worship and the role of the pastor in leading the congregation. The results show a high priority

given to the pastor as preacher, teacher, and friend. These categories were consistent with what they felt was most important in the worship service.

The final section contains a few brief suggestions as to how a pastor might proceed in implementing the insights gained from the study. It includes suggestions for using a theme to develop a service of worship, a series of studies with the congregation, and a pastor's seminar/retreat for the purpose of studying the dynamics of worship.

As a result of this study, I have come to believe more than ever that the real action in ministry takes place when people worship meaningfully.

PREFACE

A. My Personal Concern.

The event of Christian worship has taken on an increasing importance in my ministry. For over twenty-nine years I have attempted to bring the healing touch of the Spirit of God to the congregations I have been called to serve. During that time one of my goals was to be an effective counselor. Like many other colleagues I was imbued with the idea that in the function of counseling the real work of ministry was done. But as time has passed all the benefits which I had supposed would come from the counseling encounter did not come, in as full measure as I had hoped. The answer to the dilemma seemed at first to be more training in counseling, more techniques gleaned from the various schools of thought. I attended seminars and supervision groups. I read books and took courses, all of which were beneficial.

About four years ago a deeper realization began to dawn upon me. I became aware of the fact that the congregation, as well as guests, frequently commented on some specific way they were helped in the worship service. Occasionally someone would write a note of gratitude stating how he or she had been lifted and healed during a worship event. More recently a well educated Christian woman rose to her feet during the time when prayer concerns were shared and said, "I praise God for help given nearly ten years ago in a service of worship when I was seriously considering taking my life." The congregation was stunned, and I as pastor was jolted into fresh realization that one of the greatest resources for communicating God's healing power is the worshipping body

of believers.

As I have talked with denominational leaders and shared personally with colleagues both in my own Communion and others, the level of frustration over what seemed to be failing ministries disturbed me deeply. Frequently I would hear pastors say, "I am considering hanging it up to go into counseling." Some of these persons were not qualified either educationally or emotionally to deal with people's problems within the counselor/counselee context. Yet for the most part these pastors are good solid leaders who can minister meaningfully. What began to form in my mind was the conviction that properly conducted services of worship by the pastor/priest would add a dimension of fruitfulness to the ministry of these persons not realized before. But they will need to have that role held up in such a way that worship really does become an "event" in the life of the congregation.

B. Concerns of Others.

Since I began to raise questions in my mind about the validity of my ministry and the real meaning of conducting worship services, I have become increasingly aware of writers who were dealing with the same questions.

Charles W. Scott in an editorial comment wrote:

We need to be aware of the close relationship between pastoral care and worship ... However skilled and empathetic the counselor may be, he cannot in his own person reflect the caring and sharing community that epitomizes worship as a counseling 'tool,' for worship is false if it is seen as a means to an end and not an end in itself. But it should not be forgotten that one of the advantages the pastoral coun-

selor has over his secular counterparts is that he works within the context of a worshipping community.¹

Another writer comments:

Worship is a major, if recently neglected, aspect of pastoral care. Worship can be enriched by a better awareness of the pastoral dimensions of so-called priestly acts. Just as pastoral care has often neglected the corporate context so liturgical studies have frequently mired down in historical and textbook trivia, archaism, and clericalism, forgetting the pastoral dimension in divine worship. In turn, pastoral care can be enriched by more attention to the priestly dimensions of so-called pastoral functions.²

Those "priestly dimensions" specifically spoken of are: the funeral, the wedding, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper, all of which afford an opportunity for worship in a special way. Each of these events is filled with opportunities to touch the hurting life or the life in transition with the healing Presence of God.

Paul W. Pruyser, a clinical psychologist with the Menninger Foundation, became concerned for the clergy who took clinical training in their institute in preparation for their counseling work. They were being trained in a clinical setting, with medical models, and psychological jargon. However, he said:

I became aware that much of the instruction was one sided, with the consent of both parties. The theologians sat at the feet of the psychiatric Gamaliels and seemed to like it, with only some occasional theological repartee.³

As a result of his research he isolated seven variables pastors

¹Charles W. Scott, "Editorial," Pastoral Psychology, Vol. XXIII.

²William H. Willimon, Worship as Pastoral Care (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979), p. 47.

³Paul W. Pruyser, The Minister as Diagnostician (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), p. 14

could use in diagnosing the problem areas of counselees. These variables struck me as being the same basic areas which constitute the dynamics of effective worship services. For this reason I incorporated them into the study on worship which follows. Hopefully, this will illustrate how the pastor can coordinate some of his counseling skills in the conduct of worship and enhance the important week-to-week worship experience of the community of faith.

C. Thesis.

I believe that many of the same dynamics which operate in the pastoral counseling context are at work in the worship of the assembled community of faith.

This pilgrimage of personal growth has prompted me to prepare a foundational structure for the preparation of a study guide to be used in the local church to enrich and deepen the experience of worship. The basic thesis underlying this project is that the worship event informed by insights from the fields of psychology and pastoral counseling is one of the most potent and most available resources for creating a climate for emotional and spiritual health and for the healing of inner wounds. This is prepared with the conviction that raising the awareness level of the worshipper is one of the best ways to let worship be the "work of the people," which is the meaning of the word "liturgy."

It is also written with the conviction that as pastor and people work together in the process of equipping the community for worship, the pastor will also come to a new appreciation for the crucial place the worship event plays in the ongoing work of ministry.

Though the study will be informed by insights from the field of psychology and counseling, we will not be dealing with counseling techniques or philosophies, as that information is adequately covered in other books which are readily available. This will be an integration of insights gained from counseling, theology, and historical backgrounds. It is not to be a "how-to" book, but background for a guide to be written later, designed to involve a congregation in more meaningful worship experiences.

CHAPTER I

DEFINITIONS

A. Worship.

The Greek word for worship is "proskunew," which means literally "to do reverence or homage by kissing the hand." In the New Testament worship has several shades of meaning. In Matthew 2:11 the wisemen "fell down and worshipped him." That is, they did homage by prostration. In John 4:21 in Jesus' conversation with the woman at the well it is stated, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father." Here the word carries the meaning of adoration. In Hebrews 11:21 reference is made to Jacob "bowing in worship over the head of his staff."

Putting these ingredients together we see that worship, then, involves intimacy in relationship, a posture which denotes humility, the spirit of praise and honor, and the bowing of the head in submissive expectation. A general observation here is that worship is an act which involves the whole person, body, mind, and spirit.

The English word "worship" is derived from the Saxon word "weorthscripe" or "worth-ship"¹, which denotes that attitude or state wherein the worth of the person is recognized and homage given. It is an act of giving worth to another. In the case of the worship of God, it is to give supreme or ultimate worth to the Divine Being.

¹G. Henton Davies, "Worship in the OT.", in Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), Vol. IV, p. 879.

To give "supreme" worth to God entails the involvement of the whole person. Paul speaks of this in Romans 12:1, ". . . present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." In our practice of worship it is important for us to realize that there is really no distinction between our service to humanity and our service to God. It is all a part of the same experience. The practice or "cultic activity" carried on at prescribed places and times is really an extension of everything else we do and what we are. "True worship," writes Stephen Winward, "is synonymous with life, because the true God is the Creator of the universe, the ruler of all men and nations, the Lord of all life. As such, he cannot be fenced in or confined to 'the sacred' or 'the religious', or excluded from any sphere of life."²

Worship then is really "work." It is not casual, limpid activity which a person does when he or she happens to feel like it. It calls for the total involvement of a person's life. In that vein it is interesting to note that we use the term worship "service." This is exactly the way the King James Version of the Bible translates the Greek word "latreian" in Romans 12:1, which means literally "religious service," or "a servant who renders religious homage."

B. Liturgy.

Another Greek word which is used very much in the same way is

²Stephen F. Winward, The Reformation of Our Worship (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1965), p. 3.

"leitourgia," meaning literally, "a public service discharged by a citizen at his own expense." In the New Testament it carries the meaning of a "sacred ministration." So the writer of Hebrews 9:21 describes the work of Moses at the altar of sacrifice: "he sprinkled with the blood both the tent and the vessels used in worship" (leitourgias -- public service).

The conclusion we draw from this is that worship is the work of the people encompassing the complete devotion of the individual and the whole people of God. It is from this word that we gain the word "liturgy," which means what the people do, rather than what is done for them.

Liturgy in the truest sense should be developed by the people under the guidance of the pastor/priest. Granted it would take much more time and effort, but the possibilities are unlimited for a true meeting with God.

David Switzer underscored this in these words:

Opportunity for worship ..., may be an especially potent therapeutic process itself, ... There is no more appropriate setting for the reality testing of religious ideation and delusional systems than a worship service.³

And Anton Boisen put it clearly when he wrote:

The function of Christian worship is to help men (and women) to face their actual problems and difficulties in the light of the Christian faith, and to find insight and courage to deal with them constructively.⁴

I wonder what the average worship event in many churches would

³David K. Switzer, "Consideration of the Religious Dimensions of Emotional Disorder," Pastoral Psychology, XXIV (Summer 1976), 327.

⁴Anton Boisen, "The Consultation Clinic," Pastoral Psychology, (March 1960), 50-51.

be like of the implications of this were put into practice. Both the pastor and the congregation would undoubtedly find a whole new challenge and excitement in worship. It will become an "event" in the life of a congregation when all the dimensions of daily life are drawn together and held up before God. From this viewpoint, "Worship is in essence the self portrayal of the congregation."⁵

⁵Gerhard Delling, Worship in the New Testament (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), XIII.

CHAPTER II

MOTIVATIONS FOR WORSHIP

A. Basic Need.

One of the things which stuck with me from an anthropology class was that in the earliest of human life there is clear evidence of worship practices. Humanity feels impelled to worship. It is one of the highest activities in which a human being can engage. Worship distinguishes humanity from the other creatures. There is, it seems, an ontological need for a person to reach out beyond himself - to transcend himself. In that light, we may glimpse the reason why people come to church, sit through boring classes, endure mediocre music, and tolerate contact with people they would otherwise perhaps not see. The reasons certainly lie deeper than surface things. Harvey Seifert observes:

We cannot escape God, whether we take a minimal or a maximal view. God is here. We meet God in the Common life - in our bodies or our work, in music, nature, human aspirations, or religious experiences. We cannot change reality. We can only choose to accept or reject a vital relationship.¹

B. Four Motivational Needs.

Augustine in the opening of The Confessions said, "Thou awakest us to delight in Thy praise: for Thou madest us for Thyself, and our

¹Harvey Seifert, Reality and Ecstasy (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965), p. 77.

heart is restless, until it repose in Thee."² That restlessness expresses itself in many ways, but Paul W. Pruyser has suggested four motivations which underlie worship.³

1. We worship to imitate, on a small scale, ritualistically, what God does on a large scale, realistically. In baptism we imitate the resurrection of Jesus from the tomb. Holy Week services are our attempt to walk again with Christ through His suffering and crucifixion. At the Lord's Supper we re-enact that last meal Jesus had with his disciples.

How often have we heard someone say that he/she worships the same way Jesus or the early Church did. In every Church, whether they regard themselves as a free Church or a liturgical Church, there are certain patterns of worship from which they do not deviate. To do so would be to depart from what they regard as an imitation of the early Church. This is the way it must be, for a completely spontaneous worship program on a continuing basis is not only impossible to achieve, but would fragment the unifying function of worship.

2. The desire for restitution or placation also lies behind our worship. It is true that "all have sinned and come short of the Glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). Restitution for wrongdoing or wrongbeing is a powerful drive which nudges us to kneel, to confess, to give gifts of money, or to volunteer to do some job (the more menial the better). Some people

²Saint Augustine, The Confessions of Saint Augustine (New York: Washington Square Press, Inc., 1951), p. 1.

³Paul W. Pruyser, A Dynamic Psychology of Religion (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 176-178.

will strike bargains, promising to be in Church every Sunday if God will get them through this crisis. Others may be much more subtle about this aspect of worship, but the deep desire to know that you are on good terms with God is still there.

3. Commemoration is another drive in worship. This is done by organizing our worship around the liturgical church year. Great events in the story of salvation history are remembered in music, drama, teaching, festival, and worship. While in Hawaii recently, we visited two "painted churches." On the interior walls of these small structures are paintings done by a priest/artist who wanted to commemorate the great events in the life of Christ. As far as art work is concerned, they were not so great; but the story was told to everyone who entered those chapels.

4. Finally, a large part of liturgical work is related to tribute, giving God his due, breaking forth in excited praise to the rock of our salvation. The nature of tribute is spontaneity - freedom of expression when the ordered service is transcended by the expulsion of psychic and physical energy. The hearty "amen" spoken sincerely can be like an electric shock of praise to God stimulating the entire body. Spontaneous applause following an anthem may very well be the only appropriate or adequate way of responding in some cases. This was driven home to me after an Easter morning Cantata when an automobile executive greeted me at the door with tears streaming down his face asking, "Why do we have to sit on our hands after such a wonderful time of praise to God?" He wanted to give God his due but felt stifled by an unwritten rule that you don't clap in church. Perhaps if we had understood more adequately the importance of this drive, his worship and perhaps that

of many others would have been more complete.

C. Some Cautions.

As we become concerned about enhancing our worship experience there are a few traps we may fall into unless we keep the larger picture in view.

1. It is a temptation to become lopsided in emphasis, especially regarding theological doctrines unique to one's own denomination, to "ride a hobby horse." An early pastor of the Church I now serve is quoted as saying that if he had it to do all over again, he would spend much less time preaching on specifically "unique" doctrines and much more time on proclaiming the whole counsel of God.

A contemporary concern arises out of an over-emphasis by some spiritual leaders on social and political issues. In their attempt to be relevant, the focus has moved away from the eternal themes as a whole to one social issue or another. In doing this the theological foundations are neglected so that the structure which is built becomes shaky and unsure. In these cases a lecture or a rally for a social cause is substituted for worship. This is not to say that the Church is not to address these matters. There is a time, a place, and a way to do it in the total life of the worshipping community.

2. In our sincere effort to bring new dimensions to worship, it is easy to use innovations just for the sake of innovation. I just want to register a concern that changes introduced into worship have a solid basis for them. There should be a theological grounding, a psychological reason, and a practical value if they are introduced.

3. Unintentionally the tone and content of a worship service may have negative results in the lives of those attending. An exclusive emphasis on human depravity, sinfulness, and worthlessness can reinforce in disturbed people those feelings of guilt, sending them home worse off than when they came. This phenomenon has given rise to much criticism of the Church by those who deal with emotionally disturbed persons. But that is not a fair judgement in all cases, for many Churches present a good balance to those who worship.

All this is to say that it is important to be aware of the dynamics which are at work in the worshipping community. We shall now turn to that subject.

CHAPTER III

THE PSYCHO-DYNAMICS OF WORSHIP

Not only are there underlying motivations for worshipping, but there are also powerful dynamics at work during the worship event. These dynamics are those powers which work to integrate the total life of the individual, thus making for wholeness. Maturity is another word which might well be used to speak of the growth that leads to wholeness. Paul writes, "Him we proclaim, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man mature in Christ" (Colossians 1:28). The writer of Hebrews points out that "Solid food is for the mature, for those who have their faculties trained to distinguish good from evil. Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrines of Christ and go on to maturity" (Hebrews 5:14-61a).

Worship in the best sense of the word is the process whereby believers are set free to mature - to become the kinds of persons who can cope with life and become creatively alive. It is that experience where a person can scrape off some of the restricting build-up of encrusted attitudes and move on to fresh ways.

It is with this goal in mind that we look now at some basic dynamics which operate when a person or body of believers is at worship. Each of the theological themes or dynamics which are used has been given also psycho-social themes and the human virtue accompanying them. These assignments were suggested by Donald Capps¹ and are helpful in

¹Donald Capps, Pastoral Care: A Thematic Approach (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1979), p. 114.

focusing the application of these dynamics on the growth areas in a person's life.

A. A Sense of the Holy; Awe.

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of Wisdom" (Proverbs 9:10). This basic theme is echoed throughout the scriptures and has been verified through the centuries in the lives of people who have taken this truth seriously.

Jacob on his way to take a wife, slept with his head on a stone. As he slept, he dreamed. While angels were descending and ascending the Lord spoke to him, "I am the Lord, ..." (Gen. 28:13). When he awoke Jacob said, "'Surely the Lord is in this place; and I did not know it.' And he was afraid, and said, 'How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.' " (Gen. 28:16-17). This awesome experience was the point at which Jacob moved from merely filling the responsibility of an inherited blessing to dealing with the reality of God in a covenant relationship. With this sense of the holiness of the wholly Other came the realization that his life was indeed an integrated whole.

A similar experience is reported in the life of Moses. Out in the back country where he had gone to get away from the consequences of an act of violence, he was confronted by a phenomenon beyond anything he had seen before. A bush was aflame with fire but was not consumed. When he turned aside to examine the cause, a voice spoke, 'Moses, Moses! ... Do not come near; put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground ... I am the God of your father,

the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God" (Exodus 3:4-5).

Quite unexpectedly Moses came into the presence of the Almighty. He was awed. He was afraid. He was confronted with the Ultimate Reality. From that moment on his life was a continuous growth in the wisdom and knowledge of the Lord.

1. Integrity vs. Despair. Let us venture some insights into what was happening psychologically in the lives of these two men - Jacob and Moses.

Jacob had been part of a mother-son scheme which resulted in the granting of the family heritage to him instead of his brother, Esau. Putting oneself into his position, one can imagine that act of deception would have lodged in the heart and mind like a burr under the saddle of a horse. Though consciously the memory of that act could be blocked out, it would continue to haunt his days buried deep in the subconscious part of his mind. We know from studies that the subconscious part of our minds sometimes determines our behavior, rather than the conscious level. We can only surmise how Jacob felt when the full impact of this settled upon him, but certainly there were all the ingredients for the loss of his own integrity and the consequent deep despair which would accompany that period in his life. He could not escape the terrible realization that his personal integrity was at stake. In such a state of mind Jacob lay down to sleep. In that altered state of consciousness he was confronted by the holiness of God. And he became aware that there was another higher authority in his life than himself or his family. He was afraid or "awed" because in contrast to his own lack of integrity, he was faced

with that which was perfect, that which was "holy". Then he was prepared to go ahead with his life. He pledged, "If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God ..." (Gen. 28:20-21).

Moses' experience was similar emotionally. For forty years he had lived away from his people because of an act of violence. He did not dare return. He, too, was suffering with a personal, deep-seated loss of integrity and despair. He was stuck in the wilderness of his own making until he was confronted with a Reality which transcended the familiar bounds of his life. Once that encounter took place, then he could return to his people, not just to live there but to be an agent of deliverance in spite of his felt inadequacies.

As people come into the place of worship, many will come with a deep-seated sense of lack of personal integrity. They will not be sure of "where they are coming from," to put it in the vernacular. Much of this feeling will be deep beneath the surface so that its controlling influence will have tremendous power to keep such persons from experiencing the Holy. It is in this area that the dynamic of what it means to sense the "Holy" will come into focus. As William Willimon puts it, "Worship entails the risk of transcending ourselves, of facing the Mystery that both repels and fascinates us, of standing on life's limits and asking life's ultimate questions."²

²William H. Willimon, Worship as Pastoral Care (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979), p. 58.

The need to ask "life's ultimate questions" is particularly crucial today in the face of the burgeoning supply of books describing self-help, human potential, and man-centered programs which are touted as being able to answer all of the reader's problems. Their sales campaigns are doing a good job, for it is a billion-dollar business. Whatever our evaluation may be concerning the plethora of materials on the market today, it clearly indicates a deep yearning in the heart of mankind to be touched by spiritual resources which will lead to emotional well-being, a deepening of human relationships, and a clear purpose for living. The truth is that the human person is the kind of being who finds the integration of life only when he is confronted by a sense of the holy.

Harvey Seifert writes:

The identification of ultimate loyalty is the single most important decision in life. The New Testament speaks of this as a drastic choice, comparable to putting one's hand to the plow and not looking back, or leaving the dead to bury their dead, or taking up one's cross, or selling everything for the pearl of great price. Only such decisive affirmation allows the emergence of a new being, fantastically liberated and fulfilled.³

2. Wisdom - The Transcending of the Self. Worship takes on the dimensions of an "event" when people sense that they are in the presence of a holy God. It is this location of an "Ultimate Loyalty" which enables persons to transcend themselves. The vision of the Holy, while frightening, is also empowering, for when "deep calls unto deep" everything else, even our cherished indiscretions, fade into insignificance

³Harvey Seifert, Reality and Ecstasy (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), p. 78.

and so can be released. By "cherished indiscretions" I mean those little habits which seem necessary to cope with life. A common one is the "white lie." Many persons feel that this is the only way to handle some difficult situations. However, when a person can transcend himself through an experience of the Holy, release is given from such stifling indiscretions.

The absolutely crucial need for a sense of holiness should inform the times we gather for worship. How this can be done is the subject for another time. But times of worship will enable a believer to go beyond normal human insight to gain wisdom, which in Biblical terms is a gift from God. Daniel praises God in these words, "Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever, to whom belong wisdom and might ... he gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding." (Daniel 2:20-21).

When Isaiah went into the temple, the first part of his experience was that he "saw the Lord, sitting upon a throne high and lifted up." And he heard, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory" (Isaiah 6:1,3). This man of God first noted the Lord's location and was overwhelmed with the realization that the Lord was in everything. He was awed. This sense of the Holy enabled him to transcend his own world of despair and receive the high calling to go into the world with a message of hope. Life for him became integrated, not just to some personal goals, but to the eternal goals of God for the universe. But first he had to be awed -- to be assured that there is a dependable Reality to which life can be attached.

Further, to be awed enables us to see more clearly the gods which inform and control our lives. Having seen the Holy, the worshipper will

be enabled to perceive the shabbiness and falsity of other controlling forces (gods) in life. William Willimon reports that Luther used to say that your God was whatever you would sacrifice your daughter for, and goes on to say:

Sometimes when we gather on Sunday morning, we think we are worshipping God when in reality we are having a celebration of our material achievements, our musical and artistic sophistication, our moral self-righteousness, or our infatuation with the pastor. Pastors should be immensely curious about the gods of their people, not taking their God talk at face value but finding out,⁴ what it really refers to as seen in their thoughts and actions.

Worship in the community of faith must always point beyond itself. Jesus put it most pointedly when he told the woman of Samaria, "You worship what you do not know; ... " (John 4:22). Until we come to the point of awe, or a sense of the Holy, we may worship lesser gods, whom we do not know, for there is really nothing in them in the ultimate sense to know.

The true joy of being human

means to be able to perceive something ultimate, to receive some word about the dimension of the transcendent. The authentic human heritage of peace, power and perspective can be claimed. There are resources to carry us far beyond the profanity of normal existence into a quality of life that makes everything new.⁵

Life for the worshippers will move from despair to integration when a sense of the Holy pervades their lives.

B. A Sense of Providence.

1. Trust vs. Mistrust. The basic ingredient in this variable is

⁴Willimon, p. 65-66.

⁵Seifert, p. 106.

the belief or unbelief in an underlying benevolent source of help. To have a healthy sense of Providence is to believe deeply in "God's commitment to the world."⁶ To have such a sense is to have the basic ingredient for trust and thus to hope. Every worshipper in one way or another comes to the time of worship with the need to be assured that the world is reliant upon other powers than just human genius. The worshipper or the counselee many times comes with a deep sense of distrust in himself or herself or in others borne out of a pervading feeling of helplessness before overwhelming odds, or from a time of deep hurt when it seems that no one has control over anything. So they ask, "Why me? What have I done to deserve this? What, if any, is the Divine purpose in all of this?" The problem is stated most sharply by Ernest Jones, "What one really wants to know about the Divine Purpose is its intention toward oneself."⁷

This is the underlying dynamic which should inform any service of worship. For with varying degrees of urgency people come with questions about the trustworthiness of their world. Some will not trust anyone for they have had no real experience of benevolence, of a power that has any commitment to their world.

A few weeks ago a teenage boy barged into our worship service following the death of his grandmother earlier that morning. One of the ushers quietly led him out and spent some time talking with him. What he was going to tell the congregation was that God is not here, or anywhere. When He was needed most for his grandmother, He was not there -- his

⁶Geoffrey Wainwright, Doxology (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 40.

⁷Ernest Jones, Psycho-Analysis and the Christian Religion (London: Hogarth Press, 1951), p. 203.

grandmother had died. He is a young man who openly distrusts any idea of a benevolent God. He has no sense of Providence, no one to trust, no hope. He went through a similar rehearsal of attitude a few days later when a next-door neighbor, a 90-year-old lady, suffered a stroke requiring the service of the Paramedics. Here he recited his despair before the fire and medical teams, some family members, and myself. One of the Paramedics looked at me and remarked, "That young man has some real problems!" Largely it is a lack of a sense of providence. Whom can he trust? In what or whom can he hope? Obviously this is an exaggerated form of the problem. But it is one of the dynamics manifested in any worship in various degrees of intensity and at different levels of consciousness.

Pruyser also points out that sometimes people with great display of self-sufficiency make their way to the pastor's office. He writes:

Maybe they have a dim awareness that their air of self-sufficiency ... is only an air, a bungled self-presentation behind which lurks the need to be contradicted. Maybe they surmise it is wrong on some grounds, and perhaps they came precisely to receive some judgement.⁸

Such persons are much more likely to be sitting in the pews during a worship service than they are to be facing a pastor in his study. They may be there in the shape of a married couple giving all the appearance of self-sufficiency and competence. No one knows what is really going on except themselves. Yet while they are saying to each other, "We can handle our own problems," they are deep down asking for

⁸Paul W. Pruyser, The Minister as Diagnostician (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), p. 66.

some push, or some word of encouragement or invitation that will give them permission to seek help from a higher source. It comes down finally to a sense of Providence, and the event of worship can provide a door to exercising trust in a benevolent God who has a commitment to the world.

2. Hope. A further extension of this dynamic is what Pruyser calls hoping and promising. He says:

I feel that hoping and wishing are two entirely different processes. One who hopes is concerned with attitudes and global benefits, such as life, freedom, deliverance, salvation; one who wishes tends to focus on specific things: money, rain after a drought, expensive birthday presents, the death of his enemy. The hoper tests reality, the unbridled wisher engages in magical thought. The hoper refers and defers to a transcendent power that has its own unfathomable purpose; the wisher bends it down to conform to himself. In theological language, the hoper is an eschatologist who lets God be God; the wisher is an apocalypticist, who seeks renewals of his fate in which his revengeful fantasies will be fulfilled to the letter. The hoper says, 'Now I see through a glass darkly ...' while the wisher cherishes his room reservation in a heavenly motel.⁹

I have quoted this particular thought because I believe that it describes many people who participate in worship. In fact it may be a pretty good description of the underlying tone of many services of worship. With the current emphasis on apocalyptic literature, teaching and preaching in many churches, it is important to be aware of the fact that we may be training people to be wishers rather than hopers. From my own personal perspective, it is much healthier to be one who lives by hope than by wishes. "If wishes were horses beggars would ride," so goes the old saying. Transposed into the language of worship it might go like this: "If wishes were prayers, sinners would go free."

But the other side of hoping and wishing is promising, which

⁹Ibid., p. 66.

has to do with what the person expects from others and from God. Does he expect easy and pre-cut solutions, or is it enough to realize that there is a benevolent Presence with him to guide and direct in each situation? In my first pastorate I vividly recall being asked for a sure-fire four-point formula which could be used to win people for Christ. The questioner could not settle for guidelines and a promise. Nor could he cope with the realities of life, for within a few years he had to be placed in a psychiatric hospital for long-term treatment. I can recall searching for ways to communicate the certainty of God's presence as a way of life for him. But he was such a thorough-going wisher that he could not live by promise. The expectations to which he clung kept him from experiencing the freedom which comes as a result of trusting in a benevolent God. I might add that I found out later that his mother used to lock him in a closet when she went shopping so he would not get into trouble. Again, this may be an extreme case, but to varying degrees there are people at worship with similar kinds of needs.

Another way of looking at this dynamic is in the "hidden agenda," or expectations which lie beneath the surface and determine to a large extent what a person hears, or how he interprets what he hears. Now there is no sure way to know specifically what the expectations of people are. But to be aware of this dynamic can be helpful in interpreting comments people make after a service, or even during worship at the time of testimonies or prayer requests. Sometimes the hidden agenda is discovered when a member gets huffy and stays away from church for a month. It may be because of a hurt or slight, or because the underlying expectation was frustrated or missed completely. It is a dangerous

practice to assume one knows what these expectations are and to determine a course of action based on that assumption. By being aware of this dynamic one can first of all know that an area of that person's life has been touched in some way, and secondly use that awareness to explore the make-up of that person in a new way. The person who declares that he will "never attend another board meeting as long as I live," may have come to those meetings with some hidden agendas. What they are may or may not be clear to that person, but the pastor should find some way of enabling that person to identify them. In worship the pastor may be able to lift up the benevolent purpose of God so that hidden expectations can be examined and a resolution found.

When the Psalmist wrote, "To Thee I lift up my eyes, O Thou who are enthroned in the Heavens!" (Psalm 123:1), he was expressing a sense of Providence. There is in these words a basic belief in God's commitment to the world. What beautiful words to use today to convey a sense of Providence.

This sense of Providence is found expressed in the liturgies of the early Church. In the apostolic tradition of Hippolytus (ca. 200) is found this prayer preceding the Eucharist:

The Lord be with you. And the people shall say: And with thy spirit. (And the bishop shall say:) Lift up your hearts. (And the people shall say:) We have them with the Lord. (And the bishop shall say:) Let us give thanks unto the Lord. (And the people shall say:) It is meet and right.¹⁰

The interesting phrase here is, "We have them with the Lord."

¹⁰Bard Thompson, Liturgies of the Western Church (Cleveland: World, 1961), p. 20.

This is a clear statement of a personal trust in God. Such a prayer is both an affirmation of one's belief and also a reminder to check where and what one's goals are.

A proper sense of Providence can make life a whole new positive experience. Harvey Seifert puts it in these words:

Religion is a transforming quality of life instead of an isolated segment of existence. God is everywhere. We miss seeing God only because we close our eyes. Every time we step on the earth we might remember the dependability of an ordered universe. Every time you touch your skin or touch anything, there is evidence of the power that sustains all being ... Every time we experience either happiness or sadness, we might be conscious of the personal warmth of love at the heart of a living universe.¹¹

Our worship can be that event in the life of the worshipper when trust can be inspired and nurtured in the place of fear and mistrust. When that dynamic comes into play, then a person can move beyond wishing for things to hoping in the ultimate victory of the Almighty God.

C. A Sense of Faith.

1. Identity vs. Diffusion. We walk by faith. But if a person's sense of faith is weak or misplaced, life becomes diffuse, or spread out in all directions making it difficult to cope with all the pressures that bear in upon one's life. Unless there is a focusing of attention on one reliable source of guidance, the signals become confused and crossed, resulting in the loss of personal identity. Faith gives a person a point of reference from which to determine the direction one is going. Pruyser says that faith has to do with a person's "affirming or negating stance in life, to his enthusiasm or luke warmth."¹²

¹¹Seifert, p. 110-111.

¹²Pruyser, p. 67.

The biblical definition most often quoted is, "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Hebrews 12:1). For our purpose the key word here is "assurance," which speaks of relationship and confidence. It signifies an openness to transcendent power, and a confidence in what that power can do in a person's life. It relates to the grounds for one's identity in contrast with a life that is diffuse and disoriented.

Jesus talked about faith. A woman who had suffered from a hemorrhage for twelve years touched the hem of Jesus' garment and was healed. To her, Jesus said, "Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well." (Matthew 9:22). The dynamic involved here is the openness this woman had to the power of God. Her "stance" was one of openness and receptivity which led her to reach out and touch Jesus.

This is a crucial factor in the experience of every worshipper. The attitude held by many of the laity who see worship as being a "filling station" indicates a certain receptivity, but is also very passive. Many people come to worship to watch a performance, to take in all they can hear and see, but not to give or to act. We are inundated with performers today, so much so that we have developed a spectator syndrome, whereby we just sit back and let it happen, or not happen as the case may be. This attitude is carried into our houses of worship and clogs up the channels for spiritual power to operate. Under the spell of the spectator syndrome the worshipper will come with preconceived axioms of faith stuck in the pockets of the mind which are regarded as possessions to be owned. So he or she sits waiting for the performer to drop some more nuggets of truth which can be added to his storehouse of faith. To be

thus oriented results in diffusion, for such persons are looking everywhere for faith except in their own relationship with God.

The crucial questions, suggested by Pruyser, which need to be asked in regard to a person's faith are:

Does it open up the world for him, or does it draw narrow boundaries, making a little niche for an area of safety? Does it enlarge the person himself, activating all his talents and stimulating his curiosity, widening the scope of his engagement, or does it put him into a straitjacket, stifling him and constricting his abilities? Does he dare venture into learning, science, art, social action, or does he confine himself to 'nihil obstat' literature, and the sociability of Church basements? He may compartmentalize himself to intercourse with like-minded, like-thinking, like-structured, and like-molded people in a small, small world beset by fears of strangers.¹³

When I read this paragraph, I understood more clearly the significance of the behavior patterns and relational difficulties of some people in our congregation. Those who insist on choosing only people of a certain type for committees may be struggling with problems of faith. Their life is restricted and fearful. It is an emotional terror to venture into the strange new world of persons they do not know. Some of these are the type who want to sit in the "cry room," a special room for parents with crying children. They want to hear, but at a safe enough distance to not have to risk personal intimate involvement.

Worship ought to be an event where the presence of God's holy love is so evident that such persons will begin the process of opening themselves to all the possibilities God can provide. Sometimes this happens because God takes the initiative in worship. But the leader of worship who is aware of this dynamic can so design the flow of the worship event that persons whose life is diffuse can move from possessing

¹³Ibid., p. 68-69.

their faith to being possessed by faith. Unless a person is grasped by faith, there may be an inclination to move from one church body to another. Life is diffused and uncertain, for there is a lack of holding power. But being taken hold of results in fidelity of attention and service. Persons of faith tend to be stable, not because they are in a rut, but because of a power which motivates them to be steadfast and true.

2. Fidelity. Faith, or the openness of a person's life to God's activity, has many ways of being expressed. We have mentioned those who hold on to their faith as though it were an object, and those who are not really plugged into anything, yet always skirt around the edges of faith. But we need to go a step further. Faith is not as simple as it may at first seem. Willimon points out two psychological processes which operate in the worship life of most churches. They are the "approach/avoidance process, and the resistance process."¹⁴ Both of these are deeply related to the dynamic of faith or one's fidelity or devotion to truth.

In the approach/avoidance process Willimon discusses insights from Freud¹⁵ who saw that religion often functions as an escape mechanism for a person, a way of escaping from the fears and frustrations in adult life to the protected, illusory state of childhood. Freud saw religion as a way of avoiding reality and observed parallels between

¹⁴Willimon, p. 76.

¹⁵Sigmund Freud, The Future of an Illusion (New York: Liveright, 1949).

obsessive behavioral patterns and religious rituals. Willimon comments:

The conflicting feelings of fear and love, attraction toward and shrinking from, the complex and compulsive ritualization by which the troubled person attempts to protect himself from his fears: all parallel activities and feelings related to the religious life.¹⁶

The discerning pastor will not only note this ambivalence in counselees who come to his office but will also be aware of it in worshippers who move in and out of the place of worship. The back-pew-grabbers and the next-to-the-wall hidiers who make themselves more or less invisible are very likely among those who are experiencing the approach/avoidance process.

Jung saw more in religion than emotional pathology and noted that religion or the practice of faith performs a twofold function.¹⁷ First it provides an appropriate and culturally sanctioned means for helping persons get in contact with the "depths" of life. Second, religion helps protect people from being overwhelmed by those depths through a patterned mode of approach and cultural limitations upon its presumptions. What Jung was concerned for was that people have a means of approaching reality without being overwhelmed by it or without resulting in destructive distortions which may result from the loss of checks and balances provided by meaningful rituals.

Willimon comments on Jung's observations concerning the loss of primal symbols and rites in Western Culture and illustrated by what happened in Nazi Germany:

¹⁶Willimon, p. 76.

¹⁷Carl Gustav Jung, Modern Man in Search of a Soul (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1936); and Carl Gustav Jung, Psychology and Religion (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1938).

When the church in Germany lost its once-powerful symbols and its well defined ritual, it lost its means of helping people deal with the depths, the ambiguities and mysteries of life. Hitler gave them symbols, rites, and experiences that enabled them to plumb the depths but with the violent and the demonic results of Nazi activism and violence.¹⁸

I take it to mean that to "lose its once-powerful symbols and ... rituals," was to lose the comprehension of their meaning, and thus their power to enable people to plumb the depths of life. Culture had become flat and thus devoid of creative ways to deal with reality.

Willimon points out that it was this kind of insight into the meaning of worship in its truest sense which prompted Mircea Eliade¹⁹ to conclude that the function of religion, across all cultures and traditions, is safer and serious coping and adaptation.

For our purposes here we conclude that the dynamic of faith is a process in the ongoing experience of growing into maturity. Worship is that event where we can dare to pursue that endeavor as we touch the mysteries of the divine and of the human. Jesus was concerned with the Pharisee's over-emphasis on the Law and the rituals, for these matters had become a demanding end in themselves rather than a part of the divine human relationship leading to joy. So Jesus invited his hearers to "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). What Jesus was saying to them was that it was safe to be themselves in his presence, it was safe to plumb the depths of their faith, safe to be open to Divine power, for in relationship with Him they could

¹⁸Willimon, p. 77.

¹⁹Mircea Eliade, Images and Symbols (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1962).

go as far as they were ready to go and He would be there with them.

One might ponder the experience of worship practice pertaining to such high and sacred moments as baptism, for instance. How one regards this rite may give clues to one's stance in life. In infant baptism, which is more significant: the cuteness of the baby and its finery, or the deeper significance of the act? In adult baptism, does the attention focus on how nervous the person is and on his/her background, or on the profound implications of what is taking place? Subtly the principle of approach/avoidance may be in operation in such moments. We may be drawn by the "mysterium tremendum" but at the same time frightened by the realities, thus avoiding what may be a painful look into the depths of our own heart. On the other hand these rites are the means of true discernment of God's commitment to the world and to each person, giving rise to the utter joy of moving from a tendency to avoid facing God to a loyal and dedicated life of service to God.

D. A Sense of Grace or Gratitude.

The word grace is one of the most distinctive aspects of the Christian gospel. It derives its basic meaning from the Greek word "charis" denoting charm, beauty, pleasantness or attractiveness. Paul writes, "Let your speech always be gracious, ..." (Col. 4:6). In specifically Christian teaching it carries the meaning of unmerited or free favor as it pertains to the spontaneous love of God for sinful man, revealed and made effective in Jesus Christ. It is this astounding act of God which we remember in the Lord's Supper, the Eucharist, the central rite of the Christian faith as an act of joyful gratitude. It

is this act of grace which underlies the principal motive in Christian service. "A true Christian is a man who never for a moment forgets what God has done for him in Christ, and whose whole comportment and whole activity have their root in the sentiment of gratitude."²⁰

1. Autonomy vs. Self-doubt. For our purposes here we shall relate the sentiment of gratitude to those qualities of self-doubt which makes it difficult for some people to receive grace. Those who reject or avoid the kindness and generosity of others may do so because they have an excessive sense of their own unworthiness. The root of this is a theological one in that it grows from a sense of not being a forgivable person. Pruyser points out that this creates "considerable tension between their need to be forgiven and their private judgement about their own forgiveableness."²¹ It has not been an infrequent experience of mine to have parishioners come with concern over having committed "the unforgivable sin." Often they were not even sure what they may have done and would be under considerable tension fearing they may have forgotten to confess something or that they may have committed "that sin" without knowing it. Most of these persons were familiar enough with the scriptures to have been puzzled by the words of Jesus in Mark 4:29, "Whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin." They are ignoring the context in which this was said. The real issue was that the scribe did not recognize that the works of

²⁰John Baillie, The Sense of the Presence of God (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1962), p. 237.

²¹Pruyser, p. 69.

Jesus were done by the Spirit of God working through him and had attributed these things to the work of Satan. None of these persons who feared they may have committed the unpardonable sin had refused to acknowledge the Holy Spirit's activity in the world or in their life. The very fact that they were concerned about this was an indication that they were desirous of knowing God's presence. The only unforgiveable sin is the continuous rejection of the prompting of the Holy Spirit. The psychological dimension of this condition is a pervasive feeling of unworthiness to receive the grace of God's love and the carrying out of His commitment to the world. With the establishment of a proper spiritual atmosphere these unworthy feelings can be explored, accepted and released.

One person, I recall, had for years lived with deep feelings of self-doubt nurtured by feelings of lingering anger built up during years of caring for her mother. Though she had confessed these feelings to God in private prayer she was haunted with the fear that perhaps her mother had died with ill feelings toward her and therefore she herself could not be forgiven. This all came out one evening in a Bible study group when her pain had reached such a level that she had to share it. As I reflected on her willingness to share, it seemed to be made possible by a deepening sense of community in the congregation when they met for worship. A free and open acceptance of all the extremities of life experiences had been developing over a period of time. This spirit gave permission to share this pain. Through a fresh understanding of the grace of God, she was able to become a person in her own right, entering into activities with a different kind of radiance and confidence. Grace

is blocked sometimes by misunderstanding its nature or by false guilt nurturing the "unworthiness" syndrome.

More subtly, though, this dynamic touches those who not only labor under guilt feelings but also feel they are totally responsible for their own solutions. Pruyser says that there may be:

a large treasure of pride hiding behind the wailing wall of misery, an insistence on the finality of their own self-rejection - in my jargon, a large and potent core of narcissism.²²

Such persons will show up in congregations as those who convey the idea that they do not owe anyone anything and that they deserve what they have because they have worked hard for it. They are apt to be those for whom everything is a matter of rights, or a tit-for-tat kind of world in which they attempt to bring about their own salvation. And in this state men have gone to extreme lengths to cure their spiritual sickness through almsgiving, deeds of great philanthropy, self-denial and even self-flagellation. The modern counterpart is expressed in the fictitious "self-made" man (which one humorist suggests "relieves God of a tremendous responsibility!"). John Baillie points out that

psychologically regarded, no procedure could be more futile, since ... it leads not to healing but to dangerous masking of the symptoms of the disease. It tackles the problem from the wrong end.²³

The right end would be the grace of God in Christ, which needs to form the dynamic center of every worship experience.

Paul Tillich treats this same thing when he writes,

The principle that being precedes acting implies a basic criticism of the history of religion, as far as it is the history of man's

²²Ibid.

²³Baillie, p. 243.

attempts and failures to save himself ... (Such religion) distorts what it has received and fails in what it tries to achieve ... Man, seeing what he ought to be, driven by the anxiety of losing himself, believing in his strength to actualize his essential being, disregarding the bondage of the will, tries to repair again what was lost. But this situation of estrangement, in which the law becomes commandment, is just the situation in which the law cannot be fulfilled ... As an element in the processes of life, asceticism is necessary; as an attempt at self-salvation, asceticism is a dangerous distortion and a failure.²⁴

The rich young ruler (Matthew 19:16-22) is one who had a problem with grace. He was caught in the tension between wanting assurance of salvation and the pride which kept him from letting go of his belongings, symbols of his own efforts at salvation. He could not accept the fact of grace which Jesus was offering. With no awareness of having received freely, he could not give freely, and gratitude was not a part of his vocabulary. However, it is clear that he had a sense that all was not well, or he would not have asked what he had to do to be saved. In such situations all one can do is keep offering a hand of blessing, hoping that at some point pride will be set aside and he will have the will to receive and give activated. The worship time can hold up the grace of God so simply and clearly that the gathered faith group will be surrounded with an atmosphere where all the trinkets of our own salvation system can be seen for what they are and allowed to drop away into a proper perspective.

2. Will. The person filled with self-doubt, guilt and shame will have a difficult time exercising his will in a constructive fashion. Jesus' statement at the close of this priestly prayer is filled with

²⁴Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), II, 80-83.

affirmation of the will: "I made known to them thy name, and I will make it known, that the love with which thou has loved me may be in them, and I in them" (John 17:26). This kind of strength comes from knowing that he and his Father were one. Jesus was full of grace and gave of himself gracefully. It is out of this heartset that He could say, "Not my will, but thine be done" (Luke 22:42).

Grace turns the will from defensive self-serving to the joy of serving others. It enables a person to do that willingly, not out of obligation but freely, according to the nature of grace itself. When that voluntary assignment of one's will is made, then the Spirit of God reveals those special ways a person can serve. He will be given the spiritual and moral equipment he needs to adequately give response to God's call.

In order for the dynamic of grace to be experienced in worship it will be necessary to create that kind of accepting climate which will permit the worshippers to "trust God enough to be honest about their hurt, their frustration, their anger at the workings of providence."²⁵ It is well to remember that even the Psalmist was able to be very honest. "O God, why dost thou cast us off for ever? Why does thy anger smoke against the sheep of thy pasture?" (Ps. 74:1). Then a few verses later he declares, "Yet God my King is from old, working salvation in the midst of the earth" (Ps. 74:12). In this Psalm the writer moves from frustration to faith in Providence, to the awareness of the grace of God. He ends the Psalm by cheering God on, "Arise, O God, plead thy cause;"

²⁵Willimon, p. 68.

(Ps. 74:22). He gratefully remembers God's grace and finds hope in the midst of his frustration and trouble. This is what worship is designed to do, and the discerning pastor will be aware of the sense of grace his congregation has or does not have and will shape the service to declare the wonderful deeds of God our Father.

E. A Sense of Repentance.

Repentance means to change or to turn about. It is a dynamic process which involves awareness and action. Jesus began his ministry by announcing that "the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the Gospel" (Mark 1:15). His primary message was to create an awareness that a new order was coming which would mean that if they wanted to participate in it, some changes would have to be made in each person's life. If by the Kingdom of God we mean that order of life where the qualities attributed to Divinity prevail, then we are also thinking about wholeness of life, peace, joy, meaningful relations. In broad terms it signifies the healthy life most people hope for. When a person comes for counseling, there is the desire for something to change for the better. Sometimes they want somebody else to change, and sometimes they know that they themselves must change or repent. The pastoral counselor may look for signs of willingness to change. The pastor as leader of worship will know that some will come with a sense of repentance, and so he will provide a setting and opportunity for that to take place.

1. Initiative vs. Guilt. Repentance is possible when there is a high level of self-awareness. So the prodigal son in a strange land, "came to himself" (Luke 15:17), realizing how short-sighted his decisions

had been. It was that moment of self-realization which made change possible. He began to compare the wretchedness of his present state with the security and goodness of his father's household. Worship is that time when persons can reflect upon their present condition and come to a deeper realization of themselves. There ought to be enough beauty and strength in a service of worship to lift the mind to values and challenges not yet comprehended, the kind of beauty that would prompt a person to come to himself and reach up for something better - to change.

Isaiah came to that deeper sense of self-awareness when in the presence of the Holy, he said, "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of host!" (Isaiah 6:5). So the process for change and renewal was initiated and his prophetic career was launched. With the awareness of self came also a sense of responsibility to act. The degree to which a person shoulders this responsibility will be the measure of change one can expect. Isaiah took the responsibility by saying, "Here am I! Send me" (Isaiah 6:8), when the Lord asked who would go to these sinful people. Here repentance is seen as an act of obedience to God, thus a new relationship with God.

Guilt is a part of this dynamic. Like chest pains which warn of impending heart problems, the disease of a guilty conscience can be the warning sign that some changes need to be initiated. When such feelings are understood, changes will come as a person takes the initiative to do so. Worship provides that setting wherein one's guilt can be acknowledged, or to use a Gestalt expression, "owned," in order to make way for new steps to be taken.

The dynamic of guilt/repentance has been ritualized in obvious fashion: public confession in the early Church and the private confessional in Catholic churches. The so-called evangelistic churches have made much of this dynamic through revival meetings with fiery preaching and a message of doom. The goal was to bring people to repentance by arousing guilt or calling out from listeners the hidden guilts which made them evil. It was a challenge to take responsibility for their own actions, and presupposed a sorrowfulness for their situation. Paul speaks of this when writing to the Corinthian Church concerning the Lord's Supper, "Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup" (I. Cor. 11:28). The reason why this is so important is that unresolved sin may keep the communicant from receiving the benefits of the emblems of the Lord's body and blood.

To be sure, this dynamic has been overused and misused in many cases. When the concern is to be able to list a goodly number of converts, there is the temptation to play upon the guilt and fear dimensions so as to force or manipulate a person into making some kind of overt response. This, however, may not allow for a "working through" of the troubled area, thus leaving the problem intact and the individual in shambles. It has been my experience that when there is sorrow for one's behavior or circumstance, a proper approach will result in opening up of conflicting needs so they can be "worked through." I recall an instance at teen camp when one of the single counselors knelt at the altar several times during the week. When it finally became possible to really talk with him, he revealed that he had deep guilt feelings about his sexual fantasies involving two of the older girl campers. He felt

guilty for having fantasies, and felt even more guilty because in many ways he found them enjoyable. With understanding, his camp pastor helped him to work through these feelings, put them in proper perspective, and gave him the freedom he needed to be able to enjoy those acquaintances on a deeper level. He was able to change his perspective and so his circumstance. He was not immobilized by his guilt.

2. Purpose. Another aspect of the dynamic of repentance is the problem of some people accepting too much responsibility for their sin. Such persons unfortunately operate from the motivation of guilt rather than the initiative of purpose and God-given direction. It becomes a matter of thinking and sometimes saying, "What will they (or God) think if I don't do this?" Sometimes this happens in the most upstanding of church members. When it does, it is well to look for some of these signs:

1. A kind of gooey sweetness that drips honey or a perpetual smile that hides a terrible guilt or a distressing conflict. This makes it hard for grace to become real so that such a person can be free.

2. A secret satisfaction at being the worst possible sinner. They see sin everywhere, but none quite so bad as they themselves have experienced.

3. There is the kind of person who is so sensitive that people feel like they are walking on egg shells when in their presence. These hypersensitive persons are probably accepting responsibility for some things they do not need to. But it becomes a way of life for them, and they begin to take a certain pride in their humble sinfulness.

In relation to this the pastor/counselor/worship leader needs to remember that people will often resist being healed of painful

neurotic limitations, resisting the need to change. People will cling to miserable anxieties and crippling symptoms rather than risk the responsibility of living with a new freedom which might enhance their lives and unbind their creativity. We would often rather have a miserable condition with which we are familiar than a glorious but uncertain one. This psychological twist, however, may be the very point at which change can take place. One word or the conveyance of an attitude may be the little extra which will shift the balance in one direction or the other.

A new dimension which Jesus added to this theme is the necessity of becoming a different person. There is a radicalness in Jesus' words which startles the thoughtful reader. "Unless you turn and become like children you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven" (Matthew 18:3). But along with that seemingly difficult demand is the assurance that such a thing is possible: "With men it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God" (Mark 10:27).

Repentance was a prominent theme in the preaching of the early Church. In fact the Church was born out of the call to repent. John the Baptist came "preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Mark 1:4). "Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel' " (Mark 1:14-15). On the day of Pentecost after Peter had delivered a sermon the crowd was moved to ask, "Brethren, what shall we do? And Peter said to them, 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit' "

(Acts 2:37-38). It is a theme which must be kept in mind today.

Worship is a setting for change, and when the call to repentance is given, then there must be an opportunity of some kind for the people to act upon their desire to change. It is not fair to help a person come to himself without giving ample opportunity to express that decision to become a new person. The pastor could provide a channel for expressing the desire to change by asking those who feel this need to indicate their desire by raising a hand, or by moving forward to the altar at the close of a service, or by filling out a card placed in the pews ahead of time. Pastoral availability after the worship service or during the week is another means of following up on responses. It is important, however, that such indications of willingness to change be followed up as soon as possible before the spirit is diluted by other pressures.

The worship leader, being aware of this dynamic, may find the way for truly fresh paths of Spiritual growth and emotional health. Repentance or change is built on the presupposition of forgiveness - God's grace received. Jesus came with the call to repentance which was his way of telling us that life with God can be new as "children of God" (John 1:12-13). This optimistic note needs to be struck over and over so that the listener can hear and allow his life to vibrate with the same intensity of life as that of the Revealer, Jesus. Jesus said that his followers would do greater works than he (John 14:12), which is a mind-boggling thought, but an inherent truth behind the call to change and the release of forgiveness. Harvey Seifert remarks that this does not go far enough:

Always, ... religion makes a greater contribution when it goes beyond forgiveness to empowerment. God, through the structures of reality,

is constantly supporting our capacities for greater perfection ... this goes beyond atonement ... to incarnation ...²⁶

Worship contains within its movement all the possibilities for the triggering of change through the grace of God. With that change a person is no longer a slave to his own inner conflicts, but free to become a part of the great purpose of God. He is able to get beyond guilt, to exercise his initiative in doing those things which are purposeful and meaningful.

F. A Sense of Belonging or Communion.

1. Intimacy vs. Isolation. Every congregation has a personality of its own. The most central aspect of that personality is the sense of communion which exists when the believers are gathered together. Whether worship is a healing experience or not will depend to a great extent upon how much each individual person feels a part of the body. Are there feelings of isolation from one another? How embedded do people feel? Is there an awareness of those around, or is there a feeling that everyone is in isolated compartments?

This sense of communion is a larger thing than just belonging to one's group or denomination. It is a more pervasive sense of being part of a whole world, and that I as a person belong there. When Isaiah was at worship he expressed a deep sense of communion when he said, "I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips ..." (Is. 6:5). This is not a statement of judgement, but an expression of how he felt about himself in relation to his own people. He was embedded in that life, including

²⁶Seifert, p. 86.

the short-comings. Unlike so many people he did not say, "They are a people of unclean lips," but "we" are. When a pastor hears members of a congregation speak in terms of "they" and "them", he needs to look more deeply into this matter of a sense of communion.

The particular problem of people feeling isolated within their own faith group is very real. I recall being quite surprised to hear one of the leading, longstanding members of our church say, "I don't feel like I belong in the church. I feel like I am all alone when I sit in worship." Since that remark I have tried to observe how many others might feel this way. Much to my concern, I have detected a rather widespread feeling of alienation. Reading Pruyser's book helped me to realize that this is not a new problem, nor one limited to our group.

He wrote:

It is precisely within the faith group or local church that persons may experience a keen sense of alienation, ... Some sense of communion with the wider world may be present, but bitterness prevails toward the small group by which the person feels let down or wounded in some way, leading to an aversive reaction.²⁷

He goes on to suggest that some of the reasons for this may be the polarizing tendencies of such things as liberal vs. conservative views, differing theologies concerning salvation, various levels of a sense of loyalty to the national body. Sometimes it is related to social or educational differences. But the need for meaningful intimacy is so basic that to feel isolated in your own group is especially painful.

Paul had to deal with this problem in Corinth when he wrote concerning their practice of eating on the Lord's day, "When you meet

²⁷Pruyser, p. 75.

together, it is not the Lord's Supper that you eat. For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal, and one is hungry and another is drunk" (ICor. 11:20). Paul is pointing out their lack of communion, a comment which was no doubt prompted by a letter of complaint from those who felt isolated. This concern is reinforced in vs. 29 of this same chapter when he pointed out that "anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgement upon himself." While there is some question as to what "body" refers here, it is instructive to me when taken in the context to suggest that "body" is a reference to the faith group - the body of Christ in the sense of church group. Paul is impressing upon his fellow Christians how important it is for them to be aware of each other as they celebrate the Lord's Supper. He even suggests that not to pay attention to each other in love results in sickness and death. This is pretty strong language. Yet I wonder if it is too strong? Not if you have ever known someone who was starving so much for fellowship that the person's will to live was about gone.

One thing to be especially aware of is the conscious or unconscious efforts within a congregation to alienate some people as being unacceptable. William Willimon says:

Because worship functions as a place of sharing, defining, and celebrating a group's identity, those whom the group looks upon as mavericks or troublemakers will be treated as persona non grata. When such decisive and alienating situations occur, ... the pastor (will need) to uncover the various dynamics within the process of alienation and to avoid the trap of defensive argument and attempts to coerce the group or individual from alienation to communion. Compassion may be called for in some cases, sharp confrontation in other.²⁸

²⁸Willimon, p. 70-71.

Intimacy is something people want very much but at the same time fear quite profoundly. By intimacy we mean to really get to know one another's strengths and weaknesses, likes and dislikes. To be known deeply by others is a scary experience for some because they are afraid they won't be liked if their flaws are known. Often overlooked are the character-building opportunities which cluster around a person's flaws. In the intimacy of trustworthy personal relationships, those very flaws can be woven into the fabric of a personality in such a way that they become, in a sense, invisible. On a physical level I saw this happen with my father. After a horse kicked him in the face, he was left with a large, deep scar just below his right eye. For several years he avoided being with people other than his own family. However, he began to realize that those who knew him most intimately were not even aware of the disfiguration. Much to his surprise he would occasionally meet people for the first time who had to be told of the scar! His personality had so absorbed the flaw that those who knew him forgot that he had it, and many of those who met him for the first time didn't even notice it! Much the same thing can happen in other aspects of a person's life, too, when surrounded by those who provide us with a sense of belonging.

The other side of this is that to know others well can be disappointing if we have built up certain expectations for the person in our mind. So sometimes our isolation is brought on by a fear of intimacy. In our mobile society this can be a real hurdle for families. Many move from one town to the next every three or four years or less. When first arriving in a city they can throw themselves into the work of a church, but then after two or three years little things begin to irritate them.

Unless they move again soon, the chances are that they will leave that church and go to another. Never having had to face the realities that go with communion - closeness and intimacy - they now find it painful to be known and disappointing to see the weaknesses in others. They remain somewhat isolated and impoverished and this means that they have limitations on their ability to love and be loved. It is in communion that real love is experienced and shared.

Feelings of isolation and alienation may also grow because of a sense of guilt. This is often the case with those who have gone through a divorce. Especially is this true if the ones involved have a high sense of the sacredness of marriage. Their sense of the Holy brings them to a deep feeling of having violated the divinely blessed marriage bond. Because the feeling of alienation from a partner and from God is so deep, it causes them to withdraw from the faith group, too. The loss of a sense of communion can be very intense. The pastor will need to be very cognizant of this dynamic, providing ample openness and warmth to communicate the eternal love of God.

2. Love. The words fellowship, community, communion all translate the Greek word "koinonia," which is one of the key words of the New Testament. To be a Christian meant to be a sharer in this fellowship or communion and is best described by another Greek word, "agape," which means love. However, it denotes a special kind of love we might call divine love, or love without conditions. Paul used this word extensively in writing to the young churches to help them distinguish the difference between the kind of communion he and many of these new believers had experienced in the synagogue.

John Baillie sharpens this difference in these words:

The togetherness (communion) is essentially that of a triangular relationship, the three angles of which were oneself, one's fellow Christians, and God as known in Christ, and the relationship is such that from any one angle a second angle can be effectively reached only by way of the third. We can reach God only through our neighbor. We cannot love him except in loving our neighbor. Nor does God reach us or manifest his love to us save through our neighbor - that is, save in our togetherness with him. Christianity is in its very essence a matter of fellowship. No man who keeps to himself can be a Christian ... This is the only true meaning of the Cyprianic formula *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*, which I should like to translate as 'the man who keeps to himself cannot be made whole.'²⁹

Though the weight of communion in these words seems to be on the side of finding God through one's neighbor, Dr. Baillie goes on to make it clear that the "current Agape within the Christian Koinonia flows also round the triangle in the contrary direction."³⁰ It is just as true that we may not find our brother unless God finds us and we find Him. So the crucial role of meaningful worship comes into focus as a vital event in the life of the believer in providing a setting for us to be found by God, and us to find Him, and for believers to find each other. The familiar words of Jesus take on deeper significance in light of this: "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20). And the words of John are very pointed, "We love, because he first loved us. If anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him, that he who loved God should love his brother also" (I John 4:19-21).

²⁹Baillie, p. 138-139.

³⁰Ibid., p. 140.

The function of worship in relation to this dynamic is to provide that kind of setting where one can begin to realize the difference between loneliness and solitude. A lonely person is one whose dependency can be described as 'needy and greedy, sticky and clinging, dependent and sentimental, exploitive and parasitic because ... we cannot experience others as different from ourselves but only as people who can be used for the fulfillment of our own, often hidden needs.'³¹ Such loneliness demands answers now; there is no patience for deep listening, or deep reflecting. Persons thus afflicted will withdraw to live on a diet of bitterness, or lash out in vindictive tongue lashings or critical commentary on everything which happens.

Worship properly conducted can provide a climate for deep solitude. Solitude is that set of mind where 'we can pay attention to our inner self ... In solitude we can become present to ourselves.'³² In this deep experience, (it could be called an altered state of consciousness) a person can own his own life, not just the pain he is feeling or desires and wishes which may frustrate him. Anne Morrow Lindbergh describes it this way:

There we can live like a child or a saint in the immediacy of here and now ... every day, every act is an island, washed by time and space and has an island's completion.³³

What is implied here is that need to integrate all of one's experience into a whole, including the questions and frustrations, so that instead

³¹Henri Nouwen, Reaching Out (Garden City: Doubleday, 1975), p. 30.

³²Ibid., p. 28.

³³Anne Morrow Lindbergh, Gift from the Sea (New York: Pantheon Books, 1955), p. 40.

of running away from the process of struggle and growth by seeking quick and easy solutions through preying upon friends, we can live all these things and gradually grow into real persons. The basic secret to this is a sense of Providence, a basic trust in a benevolent God in whose presence ultimate victory will be realized.

Henri Nouwen makes the point that in solitude, as opposed to loneliness,

we also can become present to others by reaching out to them, not greedy for attention and affection, but offering our own selves to help build a community of love. Solitude does not pull us away from our fellow human beings but instead makes real fellowship possible.³⁴

In solitude we move to what is real inside of us, and when that solitude is in the presence of the God of love, then we have moved from the isolation and alienation of loneliness to the place of sharing in love rather than grabbing for attention. It is in the sharing that true communion is formed, a communion that does not even depend on continuous physical contact with another. It is based on a deep sense of being a part of others in a common bundle of life. In other words, we are free to love, and to be loved. It is a sense of intimacy which goes with us wherever we go, and lasts though people may be apart for long periods of time.

This dynamic of communion is one of the first felt of all the variables. People will return or not return to worship with a certain body of believers largely on the basis of the level of acceptance they experience. It is in my mind one of the most "up-front" dynamics.

³⁴Nouwen, p. 28.

As I wrote this section a member of our congregation called to share what had happened to her over the weekend. She said, "When the discussion in Sunday School Class touched on the matter of alienation and how that happens in a church, I really identified with that!" She went on to explain how people she had counted on had really disappointed her when she needed some support in some personal battles. Though others knew of her concern, no one called her to see how she was doing. "I felt totally alone and that no one cared!" But she went on to tell how as she worshipped and thought about her feelings and her situation, she came to see that perhaps she could learn from all this, and she saw that things had really worked out very well. She was able, then, to go to one upon whom she had depended to simply share what had happened, not to demand apology or attention or answers but to give of herself and her love. She had called me to share the same way and to let me know that things were all right now and that she felt closer to her friend than ever before. In a striking way I noted the movement from loneliness/isolation to solitude/intimacy to love/communion in this experience. The integration of these factors took place in the setting of teaching and worship.

Agape has many implications for the pastoral counselor and for the pastor as he leads the community of faith in worship. It is a time when what appears to be community by the gathering of people in one place physically may become true community as all the loose ends of people's lives are gathered together under the umbrella of God's mighty love.

G. A Sense of Vocation.

1. Industry vs. Inferiority. The concept of vocation in the Biblical sense means "to call" or "to invite" or "to summon." God calls to Israel, "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine" (Isaiah 43:1). This was a national vocation to a special kind of relationship and a special purpose. But within that national summons, God calls individuals for a particular task. Abraham (Gen. 12:1), Moses (Exodus 3), Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1), are examples of men in the Old Testament who were called by God to direct the vocation of the nation of Israel.

In the New Testament the Greek word "kalew" means very much the same thing. Jesus "called" his disciples, and he also "called" all men to repentance and to service for God. Paul uses this idea of calling more than other writers, first in regard to himself. He begins some of his letters with such words as, "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God ..." (Rom. 1:1). Secondly, Paul either explicitly or implicitly makes it clear that every believer is "called" of God to participate in the glorious work of proclaiming the Gospel for the salvation of men. In Romans 9:24 he wrote, "... even us whom he has called, not from Jews only but also from the Gentiles."

To the degree a congregation feels that it has a calling from God, that faith group will have a tone of inferiority or industry. One of the questions which repeatedly rears its head in our denomination is one of purpose. It usually is phrased in some such way as this: "Do we as a people, who believe in conditional immortality, have any-

thing really important to offer the world?" My observation has been that those congregations who have seen the larger picture of God's call to witness have vitality and strength. Those who are hung up on the question are unsure of themselves and have little to celebrate when they gather for worship. When talking with these members one gets a feeling of withdrawal and inferiority. There are no dreams to which they point with any confidence, and they will often speak in terms of "wishing" instead of "hoping." There is little, if any, participation in the work of God and in the life of their community. Stagnation is another way to describe their life.

The pastor, says Willimon, should ask such questions as,

What is the person's or group's sense of purpose? What meaning is attached to their activities? Wherefore art thou come? is a question that needs to be raised before every congregation on Sunday morning. The line between work and worship, between the every day, pedestrian details for the workaday world and the world within the liturgy, should be a thin and frequently broken line.³⁵

By observing the sense of vitality with which a congregation goes about its activities, one can gain great insight into how clearly they see the importance of why they gather. It has been a long-standing conviction of mine that people who have experienced meaningful times in their work and daily activities are those who celebrate the deepest when they worship. Furthermore, those who have an underlying sense of doing these things as a believer have an added dimension of appreciation which gets expressed through worship. Such persons have been able to validate their existence in the world, not because they attend worship but because they have something to bring to worship.

³⁵Willimon, p. 71.

2. Competence. Pruyser clarifies his meaning of vocation:

By this I do not mean career choice or study goals, but a person's willingness to be a cheerful participant in the scheme of creation and providence, so that a sense of purpose is attached to his doings which validates his existence under his Creator.³⁶

The important question is not, "What kind of work do you do?" That is nothing more than a social inquiry. The question that counts has to do with the whole set of values with which one surrounds his work and his leisure. When those values are formed and shaped by a sense of a calling from God, or as some express it, "the will of God," then there is a quality of competence and fulfillment which adds zest, vigor and liveliness to life. They are signs of involvement.

The work of Christians is rooted in God's call, and as such looks forward in hope. Two passages illustrate this truth: "I therefore, ... beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called ... There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, ..." (Ephesians 4:1, 4). Then at the end of the great eschatological passage in Paul's first letter to Corinth we read, "Therefore, (because of the sure promise of victory over death) my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain" (I Corinthians 15:58).

While the Christian can look forward with hope, there are several implications for the present life of those who are called which enable them to live as "hoppers" and not as "wishers." These are outlined by R. L. Scheef, Jr.:

³⁶Pruyser, p. 76.

- a). The assumed context of Christian vocation for this present life is the Church (I Cor. 1:9,26; Eph. 4:1-7; I Peter 2:9-10). In this fellowship, church members are called to be saints (Rom. 1:7; I Cor. 1:2; cf. the various functions of Christian members in the body of Christ [I Cor. 12:28-30; Eph. 4:11]). Similarly Paul himself was called to be an apostle (Rom. 1:1, I Cor. 1:1).
- b). Those who are called must live morally upright and responsible lives (Eph. 4:1, I Thess. 4:7; II Thess. 1:11).
- c). Christians will ordinarily remain in the state in which they were called (I Cor. 7:17-24). They will pursue their normal occupations, remembering that their principal duty in every situation of life is to regard themselves as servants of the Christ who called them (I Cor. 7:22-23).
- d). Those who are called according to the divine purpose know that "in everything God works for good with those who love him" (Rom. 8:28).³⁷

With these underlying assumptions comes a growing sense of one's place in God's purpose, and along with that a deepening competency in the art of living every day and movement away from inferiority. It is my observation that we have not made enough of the idea of our calling as Christians.

Luther made some serious attempts at this by lifting up the vocations which people pursued as being a sacred calling. Vocation was seen as a noble way of bringing all of life under God's sovereign rule and blessing. In his address to the German nobility, Martin Luther made the point that in Christendom there is no difference between the so-called spiritual person and temporal person save that of function and office. He said,

All Christians are truly of the spiritual estate, and there is no difference among them, save of office alone. As St. Paul says (I Cor. 12), we are all one body, though each member does its own work, to serve others. This is because we have one baptism, one Gospel, one faith, and are all Christians alike; for baptism,

³⁷R. L. Schleef, Jr., "Vocation," in Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), IV, pp. 791-792.

Gospel, and faith, these alone make spiritual and Christian people.³⁸

On the basis of one's baptism, Luther saw that all believers were equal before God and should be thus regarded by each other. Further, by virtue of baptism the believer's vocation became a spiritual projection of that person's life. No legitimate vocation was to be regarded of lesser value than another. He writes:

A cobbler, a smith, a peasant, every man, has the office and function of his calling, and yet all alike are consecrated priests and bishops, and every man should by his office or function be useful and beneficial to the rest, so that various kinds of work may all be united for the furtherance of body and soul, just as the members of the body all serve one another.³⁹

This perhaps needs to have re-emphasis so that worship can indeed be an extension and ritualizing of the daily round of work and play. But it needs to be done in such a way that it is seen as

putting one's talents to work as a participant in the process that moves the universe toward increasing integrity. With such a sense of vocation if only at some crucial moments in life, the life-span of a person attains the quality of a journey and the process is endowed with manifold meanings, without which it would only be a dreadful, boring and fatiguing grind. Life becomes a pilgrimage.⁴⁰

Pruyser goes on to point out that this vocation dynamic shows up in life styles that range from richness to stinginess. The rich will be ready to participate in life vigorously, sometimes quite indiscriminately and with mixed values and beliefs. The stingy style emphasizes caution, purity, and precision, leading such persons to a negative stance which

³⁸Harry Emerson Fosdick, editor, Great Voices of the Reformation (New York: Random House, 1952), p. 97.

³⁹Ibid., pp. 99-100.

⁴⁰Pruyser, p. 78.

cuts them off from many experiences. Emphasis on control in this person's life may seem to restrict the channels into nonproductivity. One can see these styles in play at church board meetings, in Sunday School classes and in behavior during the worship service. It can be detected in the freedom with which new ideas are accepted or not accepted. It can be seen in the spirit of humor and curiosity displayed by members, or the level of gravity and dogmatism that may infect a person's responses. All of these are clues which point to a person's sense of vocation and the level of competence they enjoy and impart.

One of the aspects of worship where this dynamic can be clarified is the offering. I have been in churches where the offering was spoken of as part of the "preliminaries" before the sermon. Willimon quotes Augustine to indicate what a golden opportunity the offering affords to remind people that, "That is you being placed on the altar, along with your gifts." Willimon continues,

The offering is a time to claim work and its products as parts of the divine purpose of things, a time to view ourselves as important actors in the continuing drama of divine activity in the world.⁴¹

The offering in this light becomes a ritualized vocational response to the call of God to be His servants. It is a way of saying "Here am I. Send me" (Isaiah 6:8). Isaiah's response was to go himself as a spokesman to carry the prophetic message of God. The offering of gifts is, besides an expression of gratitude, a way of going ourselves by providing the financial means for others who have literally said, "Send me." It is, then, a true expression of one's sense of vocation. The spirit with

⁴¹Willimon, p. 71.

which a faith group responds will be an indicator of just how clear that sense is, or what direction that sense had taken. A valid question to pose to a congregation is, "What do you think God is calling you to do today?" The response to that will be most revealing, and the process which that query may start will surely enhance the congregation's sense of vocation and competence.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSIONS

A. Potential for Healing.

The work of pastoral counseling is vital and necessary, but the full range of human needs cannot be met in the context of a one-to-one relationship. The pastor who is aware of the basic variables in diagnosing the spiritual needs of counselees will also be better equipped to make of the worship service an event where the whole range of human experience and need may be met. There are many in every congregation who will never find their way to a personal counseling session, but those same persons may be touched at the deepest level of their lives through worship. Awareness of the relationship between the diagnostic variables and the psycho-dynamics of worship will enable a pastor to move beyond labeling a counselee's emotional psychological nature, to a setting where cure can take place. Worship is that event where labels can be unglued, where people can get unstuck from their past and move into new dimensions of life. Worship should be a time when crisis points in life can be held up in ritual so as to celebrate that meeting point with God.

Worship is not a time for creating these dynamics: they are there at work to one degree or another. The secret to the effectiveness of the worship experience is the sensitivity of the worship leader whose primary task is to so conduct worship that the congregants are able to break away from the idols (gods) of their own making and enter into a living relationship with God.

This obviously places a large responsibility on the leader of

worship - the pastor/priest. But in a more positive sense

The worship service offers the pastor the greatest possible opportunity to discern the spirits and to answer the perennial, "What's going on here?..." In most churches that Sunday morning gathering will offer pastors the opportunity to see, be seen, and be with more of their parishioners for a longer period of time than any other activity of the church. While there, in worship those people will probably act, think, speak, perhaps sing, respond, and feel in more complex, revealing and significant ways than in any other activity of the Church. Most of them go there voluntarily to receive and to give, to be with others, to be with themselves, to confront the faith and to avoid the faith, to be with God, and to hide from God. And always their pastor is there, functioning at their bidding (in spite of whatever he or she claims or denies), as their priest leading them in worship.¹

B. Insights from a Survey.

I was curious to know what members of congregations thought about the worship service and the role of the pastor. A brief survey was taken among the members of several small churches in Southern California. Four hundred questionnaires were distributed; fifty-five were returned from six churches. Two questions and the results are:

1. What is the most important function of the pastor?

- preaching - 17
- teacher/trainer - 16
- aware of personal needs - 15
- spiritual advisor - 14
- worship leader - 7
- model of faith - 5
- administrator - 5
- counselor - 4

¹William H. Willimon, Worship as Pastoral Care (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979), p. 57.

professional friend - 4

2. What is the most important aspect of worship?

sermon - 24

prayer - 12

music - 13

fellowship - 12

Lord's Supper - 12

self reflection - 5

praise - 5

challenge - 2

This simple survey makes some basic points. The importance to the people of the preaching/teaching role of the pastor is obvious, and should be a clear encouragement to the pastor that this aspect of the preparation for worship is indeed a matter to be taken seriously. In contrast with so many voices shouting at everyone today via the mass media, there is the distinct desire to hear a message that has an authority other than that of exploitive commercialism. Several dynamics may be at work here. Through the message some may be reminded of the providence of God and so be able to hope in a new way. Again, the dynamic of grace may be expressed through the words and personality of the messenger so that a worshipper can begin the shift from shame to the exercising of one's will.

The desire for the pastor to be a person in relationship with them is also emphasized by the survey results. The numbers who indicated "spiritual advisor," "awareness of personal needs," "fellowship," and "friend," point to a high degree of personal need. The dynamic of

communion is in operation here involving the reaching out, the touching and being touched; there is a need to belong, to move from alienation to fellowship to unity.

A third factor is that no one mentioned the offering as an important part of worship. Perhaps none of the respondees have thought of this as being much more than a convenient way to "take up the offering," the "offering" being considered what is necessary to pay the bills. At least two dynamics are involved here: grace and vocation. If giving is a "duty" for the worshipper, it may indicate a certain inability to see themselves as recipients of the gifts of God. They may feel that they have earned what they have and are just paying their dues in order to belong to the group. It would be, then, an extension of a deep self-doubt masquerading as self-reliance and rugged individualism.

This could also indicate a weak sense of vocation, seeing this part of the ritual as little more than taking care of "the preacher" and keeping paint on the church house. What is needed here is the larger view that their contribution is indeed a part of the whole purpose and plan of God and that their participation is an expression of care and an indication that they are competent, integral parts of that purpose.

Something of the spirit of these two dynamics was expressed in this response to a question on the most important aspect of worship: "Judging myself. Doing so allows me to receive God's grace and love more fully. It is loving the Head, so that I can give God the place which is His. I will then receive from Him my resources, instructions, faith, confidence, and reassurance. I will receive also his burdens for those in need of what I can do for them as my function in the body."

This person expresses a sense of "the holy," a sense of repentance which points to personal initiative and purpose. There is a sense of communion expressed here, too. This person conveys the feeling of being a part of the family of man wanting to respond to the needs of God's children. This would indicate a sense of vocation with belief enough in his or her own abilities to prompt a movement outward to others.

Gerhard Delling points out that,

Christian worship grows out of an altogether dynamic event; it refers to a salvation - history and is a part of it - everything that is done in worship, every event in the service, stands right in the movement of this salvation - history and participates in it (and the reverse). The preaching of the Gospel is a part of it ..., ²

linking every event in the life of the worshipping community.

B. The Focusing of the Vision.

A proper awareness and application of the psycho-dynamics of worship will bring a focusing and therefore a clarifying of the details which make up the Christian faith - or the vision of Reality. Geoffrey Wainwright says,

Worship is the place in which that vision (the vision of Reality) comes into sharp focus, a concentrated expression, and it is here that the vision has often been found to be at its most appealing.³

So much does this author believe this to be true that he has written a systematic theology based on the vision experienced and clarified in

²Gerhard Delling, Worship in the New Testament (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), p. 10.

³Geoffrey Wainwright, Doxology (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 3

worship.

But how does this get focused for the congregation from week to week? How do these psycho-dynamics get applied? I am suggesting two basic ingredients which I believe will serve as a catalyst to release the power inherent in worship: the awareness and vulnerability of the pastor and the level of participation by the congregation.

I spoke of the awareness and vulnerability of the pastor. The importance of his awareness has already been mentioned; however, the dimension of being vulnerable is too often overlooked as a means of making his worship leadership effective. We as pastors can dare to be vulnerable when we realize that our personal destinies are wrapped up in our learning and remembering the instructions which are given us through study, experience, and prayer. To be vulnerable means also to be personal. When we lose from our pulpits vulnerable personal honesty, then every aspect of church life is deeply affected. For then the deep communication about the inner pilgrimage of spiritual growth stops. When the pastor is not personally vulnerable then something of the Gospel dies, and we can no longer speak to a frantic, depersonalized generation struggling with all the dynamics of human existence. By being personally vulnerable I mean open to receive God's love, open to reveal one's own humanity, open to deal with life in the present in specific fashion, and finally open to the very real possibility that those whom you reach out to help may bring about change in you.

Henri Nouwen writes:

The minister is the one who can make the search for authenticity possible, not by standing on the side as a neutral screen or an impartial observer, but as an articulate witness for Christ, who

puts his own search at the disposal of others ... he allows others to enter his life, come close to him and ask him how their lives connect with his.⁴

The second means of focusing the vision is the involvement of the congregation noted in our discussion of liturgy as "the work of the people." The psycho-dynamics of worship will not have free course to accomplish creative things in the congregants unless they are allowed full participation in planning and conducting the ritual of worship.

C. To Transmit the Vision of Reality.

The worshipping community does more than affect itself. While the reality of Christian belief is passed from one to the other within the group, the congregation also serves as a means of transmitting that reality to the world in which they live. Such transmission "helps decisively in the interpretation of life and the world."⁵ That transmission of the vision takes place through the telling of the human story according to each person's experience with God. The story will be, in one way or another, an integration of all the dynamics of life, which for the believers is in essence a vital expression of worship. The story of how we get from a fallen estate to what we can be or hope to be by the grace of God, is one which must be told and retold both from the standpoint of autobiography and the communal history. Contained in these stories are all the psycho-dynamics of the worshipping human

⁴Henri Nouwen, The Wounded Healer (Garden City: Doubleday, 1979), p. 99-100.

⁵Wainwright, p. 2.

being. Through the interplay of those dynamics from one experiencing heart to another, comes healing and a new creature. "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new Creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come" (II Cor. 5:17).

The diagnostic variables used by the pastor in counseling can provide the most realistic way to approach the preparation and conduct of worship. Just as the pastor uses these to diagnose the basic orientation of a counselee, he can also learn to assess the personality of the congregation as they gather for worship. Careful incorporation of these psycho-dynamics into the fabric of the worship service will assure that the human story and divine reality will intertwine in a way that will bring completeness and fulfillment to the worshipper.

CHAPTER V

STEPS TOWARD APPLICATION

There are a number of ways by which the pastor in a local congregation can utilize the insights of this study to enhance the worship experience.

A. Design a Service.

1. The first and perhaps most obvious way to utilize this study is for the pastor to plan worship with the psychodynamics outlined in this paper consciously in mind. For example, the theme of Communion might be used as the central motif. This would logically be appropriate on a Sunday when the Lord's Supper or Eucharist is to be celebrated.

The service might begin with an invitation for individual members of the congregation to express praise to God for blessings received. This would immediately call the congregation together on a note of praise, provide immediate participation by the congregation, and create a sense of community.

At the time for prayer an invitation to share personal needs could be given and one of the fellow believers asked to pray for that need before receiving another request. It is usually well to have qualified lay persons prepared beforehand if this practice is followed. This would also develop a sense of mutuality and belonging among the worshippers.

Such hymns as, "Let Us Break Bread Together," "Blest Be the Tie that Binds," and "O Brother Man," could be used. The Choir anthem

should be appropriately chosen.

Ephesians 2:11-22 could be used as the Epistle lesson, John 17:20-26 could be the Gospel lesson, both of which emphasize the oneness of the body of believers. The sermon could be on the theme of Love, pointing out that our individual wholeness is directly related to how well we can receive and give love.

The ancient custom of passing the peace or the kiss of peace (Romans 16:16) incorporated into the service just prior to the Holy Communion would give opportunity for expressing love, and might very well be the action which would help draw some worshipper out of isolation into fellowship (koinonia).

2. The appointment of a committee on worship would greatly aid the pastor in keeping worship fresh and relevant to the needs of that congregation. The stimulation of several persons working together would provide a creative and ongoing means of keeping in balance theological truth, the psychodynamics of worship, and the contemporary setting.

B. Conduct a Study.

A guide for the study of worship by the congregation would be another way to increase a congregation's awareness of the meaning of worship. Every generation needs to go through this process of teaching. Ferdinand Hahn points out,

We cannot simply reach back to the worship of the primitive Church. The New Testament evidence cannot be normative in the sense that the various elements and forms must all be recovered and imitated. They must, however, provide a model for renovation and restructuring in the face of all adherence to a later, historically developed form of worship in the face of all traditionalism and legalism in liturgical matters. The proper form of worship is always proper

only to its own age, because only thus can the missionary function of worship and its function in equipping the faithful for service in the world be taken seriously. In this process the crucial principles of the New Testament understanding of worship must be vindicated anew theologically and given appropriate expression.¹

It has been the intention of this paper to present psychological themes or dynamics which can be used as a guide for making worship proper for this age. We are a psychologically oriented generation, familiar with much of the jargon associated with counselor/counselee relationships. It is consistent with this mindset to approach worship from this perspective.

Such a study would need to include the following major areas:

1. Bible Study.

a. Worship in the Old Testament using such Biblical materials as Leviticus, Exodus 12:1-27, Isaiah 6:1-8, and poetic writings such as Psalm 95.

b. Worship in the New Testament, showing the new dimension Jesus brought to the worship practices of his day in relation to Jewish worship, would be enlightening. In this study one would want to work with such materials as are found in Mark 2:23 - 3:6; 7:1-13; John 4:16-26.

The worship of the early Church can be traced in such passages as Acts 2:1-47; I Corinthians 11:17-23; I Corinthians 14 and others. However, it is well to point out that it is difficult to find a clearly preserved "order of service" in the New Testament. But one does find themes and creedal statements such as "Jesus is Lord" (I Cor. 12:3;

¹Ferdinand Hahn, The Worship of the Early Church (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973), pp. 104-105.

Philippians 2:11) which were a part of the Church community worship.

It is also possible to isolate the psychodynamic variables in these passages. For instance, one notes the sense of Providence in such passages as Acts 1:16, "Brethren, the Scriptures had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David, concerning Judas who was guide to those who arrested Jesus."

c. The book by Ferdinand Hahn just quoted (see footnote #1) would be a resource to read and discuss together, since it traces the development of worship in the early Church.

2. Worship in the Church after the First Century. As the Church became more structured, her worship took on more consistent form and style. The early Church fathers began to write down instructions for worship and actually prepared complete services to be used by congregations of believers. I would recommend the study of some of these orders, for they are rich in meaning and can be used as a resource to develop meaningful services yet today. For purposes of working with a congregation I would limit this historical part to that of a review and some analysis of a few of these services, both of the Catholic and Protestant traditions. An excellent resource for this is Thompson's book, Liturgies of the Western Church (note bibliography).

For example, in Thompson's book "The First Apology of Justin Martyr" and "The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus" would provide valuable insights into how these giants of the early Church went about the conduct of worship. Things to note would be the extent to which the laity was involved, and where the psychodynamics of worship manifest themselves.

In this same book Luther's "German Mass and Order of Service"

would add further insights as it illustrates how a worship service can be designed for a specific purpose. In this case the service was designed to be conducted in public where there would be many non-believers who could perhaps be persuaded to become Christians. Again, it would be important to look for the psychodynamics at work here.

3. Contemporary worship styles would be another area to review.

There has been interesting experimentation in recent years, much of which is made up of gimmickry and is manipulative. But through this process has come some meaningful insights which can be instructive.

Such phenomena as the charismatic movement, the art of meditation, the small-group Bible Study, and the rise of cults are worthy of study. Operative in these movements are some of the psychodynamics which we have been exploring in this paper. For instance, a brief overview of the rise of the cults will reveal the dynamics of communion. To many isolated people this comes as a powerful force which speaks to a need in their life. As Christians we can learn from them and incorporate into our worship practices the dynamic of love and communion consistent with Biblical teaching.

Worship is the dynamic core of the Church's life, reflecting the tone of the congregation and setting the spiritual climate for the future. Worship properly understood is the thermostat which controls the spiritual temperature of the world. Does that sound like a large order? Yes, it is, but it is the God of the universe whom we worship, and "with God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26b).

4. Hold a workshop to plan and conduct services of worship incorporating the themes and patterns discovered in the study. This

experience could be used to create an on-going worship committee which would work closely with the pastor in the design and conduct of worship.

C. Develop a Seminar for Pastors.

Another direction to take in making worship more vital is to plan a special study for pastors. Such a study could be conducted on a two- or three-day retreat, a series of several sessions over a month's time, or in a two-day seminar held in a local Church. One possible approach is briefly outlined here.

1. Open with a well planned worship experience, incorporating as many of the psychodynamics as possible.

2. Analyze the experience asking such questions as: What were some of your feelings as the worship service proceeded? What steps or movements can you identify in the service? What new or fresh insights have come to you through the worship experience and the discussion?

3. Spend a short time sharing problems, uncertainties, and blessings encountered by the pastors relating to the conduct of regular Sunday worship.

4. Make a presentation on the psychodynamics of worship, using Biblical references to illustrate and instruct. Much of the material in this paper could be presented.

5. Plan a worship service which can be experienced in each of their respective Churches. If a group is large, it may be necessary to break into smaller groups creating several worship services. Ask each pastor to write a review and critique of the service after it is conducted in his/her respective church and send it to a chairperson who

will compile all the reports and in turn send them to all the participants.

D. Summation.

Whatever procedure is used to enhance worship in the local Church, it is important that the pastor guard against doing all the planning himself, or simply rearranging and tinkering with the mechanics of worship. This may put him in the position of thinking that he must constantly check the feeling level of the congregation to see whether they like this or that kind of service. To do so may remove worship from a strong theological base, placing it on the uncertain foundation of human emotion and whim. Worship must always be firmly grounded in God's sovereignty and Word.

More importantly, the pastor needs to understand his role as educator/equiper of the people. In this role he/she will involve as wide a spectrum of the congregation as possible in the full experience of worship. In this way pastoral leadership will be most effective in making worship the work of the people, and will ensure that the whole range of the psychodynamics of worship is appropriately incorporated.

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